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UIA | URBAN INNOVATIVE ACTIONS

The Urban Lab of Europe !

The CoRE Project Journal N°1

*Project led by the **City of Vienna***

**INTEGRATION OF
MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**

CoRE integration im Zentrum

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Région
Hauts-de-France

The CoRE project

As a response to the dramatic increase in the number of refugees arriving 2015 in Vienna posing huge challenges to social welfare and social housing systems as well as to the labour market, the CoRE project aims at strengthening the whole integration system and at making it fit for new challenges. CoRE develops and provides new integration offers, which address the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. CoRE also contributes to the adaption and optimisation of instruments and services in order to make them more user-oriented. Thanks to the innovations implemented within the project, existing ruptures and breaks in the integration process will be overcome.

The project firstly is an empowerment hub jointly planned, utilised and operated by public institutions, NGOs, civil society initiatives and refugees. By pooling resources and knowhow and by making refugees equal partners instead of passive beneficiaries, it helps to initiate smart transformation processes for the whole integration system. Secondly, a physical infrastructure in the form of a CoRE building, which will be adapted to the needs of the project offering community spaces as well as service spaces. And thirdly, a think tank, which monitors, analyses, and innovates policies and develops and tests new solutions.

CoRE's focus on skills and competences ensures that already during the asylum procedure, refugees' competences will be routinely assessed and documented in a newly developed data base. Activities in the field of career planning, competence development and specific trainings facilitate refugees' readiness for the labour market. As a result, refugees' preparation for the labour market starts already during the asylum procedure.

With a focus on peer mentoring and information offers in refugee's native languages, CoRE ensures that asylum seekers' integration in Vienna starts right after they settle in Vienna. Thus, refugees will sooner be able to understand basic issues of life in Vienna, such as housing, education, health care, law, rules and codes for living in the city, etc.

Finally, CoRE shows a wider public that - despite the existing challenges - integration of refugees can be successful and can add to the prosperity of the city. CoRE contributes to making diversity a success in Vienna – by finding solutions to current challenges and by thinking ahead and therefore preparing the city for future challenges.

Partnership:
- City of Vienna, Municipal Department 17, Integration and Diversity (Lead partner)
- Vienna Social Fund (FSW)
- Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (waff)
- Vienna Business Agency (VBA)
- Vienna Board of Education-European Office

Table of Contents

1 Executive Summary

In defining and justifying its innovative approach, the *Urban Innovative Actions* Initiative refers to the specific European experience of enlightenment: It is this context that challenged the traditionalist and fatalist attitude toward history and change. Since the late 18th century, autonomy and self-determination represent leading but also idealized concepts for shaping present and future times. These concepts were based on a confidence in human capacity to overcome the pathologies of industrial modernity, to reduce negative living conditions, to continuously improve quality of life.

Today, there is growing awareness concerning the *limits to growth*, as the Club of Rome stated already in 1972. Since then, realities have become more and more contradictory: Growing urbanization and increased use of technology, and a general improvement of living conditions stand in contrast to increasing environmental, economic and social crises. Tension-filled realities characterize also European cities, places and contexts of accumulated wealth and well-being, but also of socio-economic polarization and advanced marginality, and of increasing environmental vulnerability at the same time. It is in this specific context that the *concept of innovation* is of growing importance, for cities and citizens. However, the point is not to define, in its most exact way, the true or genuine meaning of innovation. More interesting, and more relevant, is to understand the various forms innovation applies in specific city contexts, becoming manifest in concrete strategies, measurements, and interventions, mirroring main challenges of our today's world, but locally framed. Innovative actions address no longer simply attempts to improve quality of life but solutions for increasingly complex problems, characterized by strong, and inextricable interconnections between the social, economic and environmental dimensions.

The arrival and inclusion of immigrants, in particular in the context of forced migration, is a topic of global relevance. However, and beyond the dominant human rights discourse, how do our societies respond to this experience, in particular to the experience of refugees, of those who are seeking asylum? There is a paradox: In our globalized, complex world, solutions are increasingly delegated to local levels. Cities, local authorities, citizens' and social movements are drivers of urban innovation. But its strategies and actions are shaped by the rationality of national or transnational actors which define its rules, regulations, institutions.

In public debate, there is a temptation to trivialise complexity, and to decontextualize situations of action. However, it is essential to know how immigrants, refugees in particular, are concretely welcomed in our cities, how they get access to rights, to information, and to institutional support, how they find bridges to local people, or suffer unfriendliness and inhospitality. And it is essential to be aware of the multi-level, and multi-scale perspective of

urban systems where innovative initiatives, aiming to overcome obstacles of integration, are linked to current urban trends and problems but also to general national and transnational developments and policies.

This is also the basic assumption of Vienna's CoRE project: Local innovation contributes to new, i.e. better and more effective, forms of empowering action, to a strengthening of cross-sectoral and transdisciplinary cooperation, and to reshape the dominant understanding of 'integration' and 'solidarity'. The Vienna CoRE initiative is committed to the Urban Agenda of the European Union aiming at improving the quality of life in urban areas. It is following the EU social cohesion approach, promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination, with emphasis on the inclusion of the particularly vulnerable group of refugees. Main topics of the Urban Agenda and its partnership concerning the inclusion of migrants and refugees are addressed: access to labour market and housing, access to information and training, access to legal certainty and safety.

The CoRE project had been developed under the impression of the so called European migrant and refugee crisis. In 2015 more than 88.000 refugees asked for asylum in Austria, in 2016 the number decreased to 42.000, with declining tendency after. The city of Vienna was (and is) more generous than other Austrian regions to host refugees; among those who are entitled to asylum a majority live in Vienna. The innovative character of the CoRE project refers to the statement that inclusion has to start from the very beginning and by involving the most vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers waiting for decision, or unaccompanied minors. And it is based on the assumption that successful inclusion needs both to empower for action the targeted populations and to interconnect the various stakeholders from different fields of action, including civil society. That way, the project is aiming to boost the cross-sectoral circulation and transfer of knowledge and competences, multi stakeholder interconnectivity, and new forms of multi-level governance.

This first journal of Vienna's CoRE project points to three big challenges. *Public procurement* refers to the tension between regulative order and its opposite, hybrid organizational forms of institutional flexibility and fluidity. *Cross-sectoral cooperation* reflects the relation between functional differentiation and the necessity to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge-power. *Empowerment in Contexts of Uncertainty* discusses the relation between municipal responsibility (and activation) and (national) legal constraints.

2 Public procurement

2.1 A flexible approach in need of flexible structures

Mentioning *public procurement* as a challenge refers to the tension between regulative order and its opposite, hybrid organizational forms of institutional flexibility and fluidity. The project thus contextualizes the Urban Agenda objective to contribute to a better and more transparent access and use of European funds; public procurement regulations represent one strategic tool in that regard.

Selected and awarded in first call of Urban Innovation Action, the CoRE project envisages the development of innovative and integrative initiatives aiming to empower refugees and asylum seekers, to encourage the interlinkage of actors involved in the aid to refugees, and to improve the integration system.

The project agenda includes various tasks and targets, amongst others the following: the strengthening of partnerships by new, more flexible ways of collaboration in the field of refugee aid with its diversified public and private actors, also aiming to convert, and to pool, their fragmented knowledge into a useful and accessible form; the uncovering and valorisation of the often invisible (and invisibilised) social, cultural, and professional capacities of refugees; the stimulation and framing of processes of (self) empowerment; the creation of an open space for encounter and exchange; the development of new forms of support for volunteers engaged with refugees etc.

What these tasks need is a flexible framework, and this concerns also financial aspects, in particular with regard to public procurement. The given set of regulations is in fact challenging.

The CoRE-project aims to encourage the participation of civil society initiatives and refugees, being enabled to contribute ideas and realize them. This approach requires flexibility also with regard to the system of public procurement, but hardly compatible with the stolid and rigid mechanisms of the given procurement system, also with regard to the duration of the formal award procedure.

To give a concrete example: The CoRE-project envisages the organization of physical facilities, a place serving as hub for integration where civil society initiatives and refugees are provided with space and other resources (material, etc.) to enabling the realization of their plans and ideas. It is not possible to predict who will actively use that place, and who will develop which activities and what resources will be needed.

Troubles in the execution of public procurement regulations are, on the one hand, a consequence of lacking predictability in a project justifying its innovative character not least through its open, non-standardised form. On the other hand, the project requires many contracts of small monetary value wherefore the expenditure of time and costs required by following the formal requirements appear disproportionate.

2.2 Unintended consequences, and lessons to learn

The CoRE project is challenged by the tension between the politically desired creation of innovative and dynamic processes of transforming and improving the support for refugee and asylum seekers on the one hand, and the established institutional processes and complex legal requirements in the field of public procurement on the other.

As a consequence of the large number of legal issues relating to public procurement procedures (both with regard to in-house awards, direct awards and public tenders) and related clarifications with legal experts, some project related activities had to start later than intended. This concerned e.g. the organisation of the hub of integration, the buddy system, or the implementation of a think tank.

The issues concerning public procurement are also a consequence of the short lead time of the project. The CoRE project started only half a month after receiving the acceptance letter. A longer period of initiation would have created a better context for preparing and planning the complex procurement procedures. In that regard, a lesson to learn for future applicants concern being aware of the limited time budget of UIA projects when compiling the application.

At the same time, it is important to state, that the delay in implementing some of the early CoRE tasks, caused by applying the complex norms and regulations of public procurement, has to be seen as in connection with the protracted implementation of the public procurement directive (2014/24/EU) in Austria. The national parliament has still not passed a respective law, and only published a first blueprint. In consequence, there exist legal uncertainty with regard the interpretation and applicability of certain terms of the directive.

To overcome this legal uncertainty can only be met by fully implementing the directive into national law. However, it is not yet foreseeable when the recently newly elected parliament will take a decision.

3 Cross-sectoral cooperation

3.1 The complex field of refugee aid

How to promote *cross-sectoral cooperation* if the inherent logic of institutions – or more precisely: the institutional logic of organizational fields – produces insurmountable barriers? How to overcome the pathological consequences of advanced functional differentiation that hamper collaboration? How to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge-power?

The challenge of cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination is of particular relevance in the field of asylum where the support for refugees refers not to the competence of one single institution, and cannot rely on one single approach; support for refugees is a complex, and long-term task, requiring the involvement of different perspectives and actors whose logics of reasoning, speaking and acting are getting in conflict from time to time.

This is also the case in Vienna: On the one hand a rather heterogeneous category of refugees[1], people of diverse national and ethnic backgrounds, of different age and with various experiences of persecution, and different ways of escape. They all witness the trauma of the forced migration, share worries with regard to family members and friends left back in their country of origin, and feel unsafe, and unprotected, in view to an unknown societal context and an uncertain future. Most refugees suffer a lack of autonomy and economic resources, and they are in need of a system of coordinates in the country of arrival where an uncontrollable and uncertain asylum

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[1] In Austria, between January 2015 and July 2017 145.252 persons have applied for asylum. 33% of asylum requests concern women, and 9% unaccompanied minors. The main countries of origin are Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Nigeria, Russian Federation, and Somalia; see Statistik Austria. 2017. Migration&integration. Zahlen, daten, indikatoren. Wien, p. 36f.

decision process is to be expected. Yes, indeed, many refugees experience spontaneous, informal help by civil society actors, often by single citizens or associations of volunteers. At the same time, distrust and anti-immigration agitation predominate in public debate, and refugees often come across unfriendliness in their daily-life interactions with local people and neighbours.

On the other hand there is a dozen of actors controlling the field of aid for refugees: civic initiatives and private help agencies, charity and non-profit organizations, social providers and public services in health and education, finally local authorities with their differentiated responsibility from child protection and pre- and basic education to health, housing, and financial support[2].

In the context of the so called refugee crisis 2015 and 2016 non-governmental associations, and non-profit organisations, took over an important role as advocates in defending the rights of refugees, and "in maintaining humanitarian standards and effective crisis management"[3].

What has been so impressive in relation to the so called refugee crisis – the social power of below – appears much more vulnerable in the context beyond: Durable civic engagement requires interlinkages with institutional actors.

As a federalist and corporatist country, Austria is known for its hierarchized and fragmented system of competencies and responsibilities, impeding any attempts of cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration. This is of particular relevance against the background of current budgetary restrictions.

It should be more than a lip service, a simple statement of intention, if it is said that issues in the field of migration and asylum are requiring cross-sectoral cooperation. There is a real need. But how to overcome the systemic and institutional barriers?

Sustainable forms of cross-sectoral cooperation and partnership are rare, since the specialization of tasks, and the more general process of functional differentiation behind, are contrasting these efforts. The distinct institutional logics and organizational rationalities, justifying the existence of barriers and boundaries, and the fragmentation of knowledge, constitute definitively a key challenge of the CoRE project.

One of the challenges in this regard relies to the fact that the fragmented reality reinforce the tendency of mainstream actors – both national and regional bodies, but also nongovernmental organizations, and intergovernmental agencies, including UNHCR – to concentrate on emergency aspects of aiding refugees. In opposite to that, the CoRE project is driven by the conviction that despite the difficult, complex, and uncertain circumstances a long-term, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral orientation is required.

Acknowledging the long-term nature of refugee problems implies to ensure that the needs of the refugees take precedence, and that all those who are involved in the aid and provision for refugees are adequately trained and supported.

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[22] In Austria, asylum seekers and refugees in subsidiary protection (or in equivalent situation) have access to provision of basic supplies. Entitled refugees can apply within the means-tested minimum income scheme.

[3] Ruth Simsa. 2017. Leaving Emergency Management in the Refugee Crisis to Civil Society? Journal of Applied Security Research, Vol. 12(1), p. 90.

Cross-sectoral cooperation also requires a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies. This applies, not least, to the involvement of the refugees themselves, and the communities they are embedded in. Promoting the participation of refugees is an essential task, even if it is difficult to achieve.

There is a variety of questions: How to empower refugees without creating new dependency? How to commit refugees to participation and self-help if the situation is marked by existential uncertainty and insecurity?

3.2 Opportunities and challenges in cross-sectoral cooperation

According to social science literature, cross-sectoral cooperation may take on three different forms[4]: as *cooperation within* the political-administrative system (in form of a collaboration of different ministries, magistracies, or administrative divisions etc.); as *external cooperation* of the political-administrative system with relevant actors outside the governmental sector, including the municipal level; it also concerns partnerships with civic and non-governmental actors and associations; finally, as *cooperation between* state, market and third (non-profit) sector.

The CoRE project is following an innovative integrative approach by interlinking on the one hand five key institutions in the field of social policy, diversity and integration, education, employment, business; on the other hand, the project specifically addresses refugees (both entitled and new arriving) and civil society actors aiming at taking part in activities of the project. Challenges result already from the partnership between the five institutional actors. The latitude and variety of the institutions involved – from the

City of Vienna to the Vienna Social Fund, the Vienna Employment Promotion to Vienna Business Agency and the Vienna Board of Education – underline the necessity to create a concise framework of collaboration.

Beside the implementation of a steering committee, which from time to time takes place in an extended format, the project is in need of a continuous exchange concerning the project-related contents, objectives, and its goal attainment. This ambition goes far beyond traditional means of project monitoring or evaluation. It requires much more a direct and personal commitment of the partners who get involved not only in communicative exchange but in a collective learning process, generating a common understanding, shared semantics and problem definition.

For that reason, it is planned that the actors involved will be invited, to be part of new, inspiring contexts such as excursions, workshops, or round tables for exchange. Finally, and driven by the interest and commitment to develop sustainable strategies, it is important to provide feedback loops within the involved institutions

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[4] A. Trojan, H. Legewie. 2001. Nachhaltige Gesundheit und Entwicklung: Le1itbilder, Politik und Praxi er Gestaltung gesundheitsflördernder Umwelt- und Lebensbedingungen. Frankfurt/M. : VSA, p. 251.

themselves. This is definitely not an easy undertaking in a setting where time is a scarce and limited resource, institutional constraints are dominant, and the perspectives rapidly tend to drift apart. The cross-sectoral cooperation involving both institutional and civil society actors, particularly from the field of refugee work, and also refugees themselves, is in a similar way demanding. In that regard, the key challenge refers to the asymmetric power-relations defining the interactions between the different collective and individual actors.

With the *hub for integration* - a spacious floor in a business building, centrally located in Vienna – the CoRE project disposes of a tool aiming to bridge, and to interlink, the various perspectives, horizons, and life-worlds.

This *hub for integration* is open to refugees and civic initiatives. It serves as a place for learning, also in the sense of peer group based self-empowerment, for the training of peer mentors, for improving labour market related competences, for the circulation of information, but also creative, and artistic, activities. The challenge consists in avoiding top down regulations, and in creating, and ensuring, a long-term opportunity structure for open exchange: a change of perspectives, and mutual learning processes.

The second UIA Expert Journal for this project will particularly focus on the CoRE initiative creating a multi-functional, and multi-usable space for integration.

4 Empowerment in Context of Uncertainty

4.1 Integration from day one, and the challenges of multi-scale governance

How to promote *empowerment* and *self-empowerment* in a context where cities and local authorities are increasingly targeted with the imperative of responsibilisation and activation but within more and more restrictive legal (and budgetary) constraints?

The European Urban Agenda points to the fact that improving quality of life has also to include most vulnerable groups. However, integration is not only a local agenda and goes beyond the role and agency of cities. As in many other countries, in Austria asylum and refugee policy falls within

the competence of national legislation. Also the availability of resources is affected by decisions of the national government. In this regard, the consequences of the legislative election in October 2017 remain uncertain. In contrast, regional and local bodies are concerned with the execution of concrete tasks such as accommodation, access to health services and education, employment, language courses, financial support, legal advice, accompaniment of minors etc., often in cooperation with civil society. As in many other countries, the relation between general (national) asylum and refugee

policy (and more generally migration policy) on the one hand, and local practices on the other hand, is full of tensions, and contradictions. This situation constitutes a challenge of particular relevance for the CoRE project, also in practical terms.

One of the key tasks of the CoRE project is to promote what we may call *instant integration* or *integration from day one.* This approach is contrary to a reality of an asylum regime that fixes asylum seekers for a long time in a position of uncertainty, and as excluded outsiders. With rare exceptions, and as long as they are not entitled to asylum, refugees are systematically excluded from labour market, hampered in their access to housing, socially stigmatized, and cut off from the majority population. Due to their personal history – experiences of persecution and flight – and to the uncertain outcome of the asylum procedure, and their future in general, refugees are vulnerable to poverty and distress, discrimination and exploitation, human rights abuse and institutional violence. And they are exposed to the risk of detention and deportation once the case has been decided negatively.

This is what all refugees seeking asylum share: *waiting.* In the asylum determination process, waiting does not refer to everyday life waiting events nor to something long-term or chronic. In this context waiting is much more undetermined and dubious: a kind of experienced marginality, of hanging in-between.

Research shows that in the context of asylum, waiting time is not necessarily experienced as passive or as an 'empty interlude'. [5] Asylum seekers structure their time, they fill it with routines, activities, and reflections on their future. However, in precarious contexts, as it is the case of asylum decisions, waiting also has a strong destructive power. It is a source of stress,

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[55] Rebecca Rotter. 2016. Waiting in the asylum determination process: Just an empty interlude? *Time & Society* Vol. 25 (1), 80-101.

anxiety, and frustration. To let somebody wait in uncertainty, can also be seen as a strategy of control. To keep under observation, and control, those who are perceived as not wanted, who are not welcomed, and who are categorized as members of 'dangerous classes'.

In Austria, refugees often have to wait up to two years to be interviewed. In August 2017, 85% of asylum seekers have been in procedure for more than one year[6]. For all of them it is unforeseeable by when the decision will be taken – and what will happen afterwards. If the decision is positive: How to participate in a society that has treated one as an outsider, and where the stigma of being a refugee does not disappear with the entitlement to asylum? If negative: Is it nevertheless possible to gain protection in the host country? Who may give support? And how to bridge the time until deportation?

The basic idea of CoRE is to acknowledge that integration has to start from the very beginning. Not with integration measures only after the asylum decision, but "from day one", immediately after having settled in Vienna.

In recent years, the City of Vienna has developed several instruments that give orientation for refugees who want to step into the city. The CoRE project release an important pulse, not only to strengthen existing instruments facilitating integration, but also to develop new, innovative measures, and to pool them with initiatives from other parts of society and in key fields of integration: Civic and private initiatives aiming at building up social bridges and links with the local environment; co-operations of diverse public bodies targeting the reduction of barriers in access to labour, education, health, and housing; and most notably the creation of space and opportunities promoting forms of self-help and the capacity to act (empowerment).
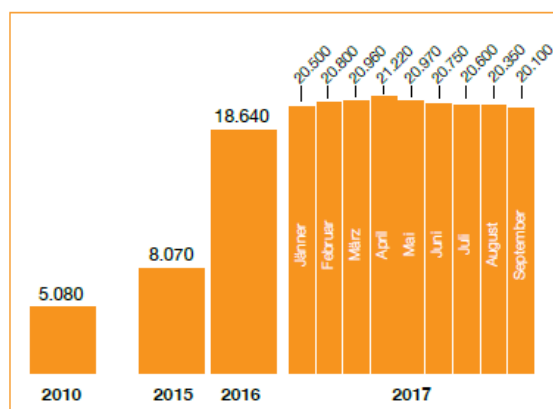

Table: Number of Refugees with provision in basic supplies. Source: Fonds Soziales Wien. 2017, S. 2.

With 20.100 individuals, the City of Vienna cares for 27% of refugees in basic care support in Austria. There is a majority of men among the refugees, 4% are unaccompanied minors. Most of this population, mainly with provenance from Afghanistan, Irak and Syria, is in the asylum determination process, in waiting status for decision. The statement that CoRE wants to promote "integration from day one", means concretely: an intensified information policy and orientation courses, a buddy-system involving people from same community and/or with similar stories and with a secured status in Austria; low-threshold offers for continuous training to bridge the waiting period and to enrich the existing professional skills; a room for coming together, for learning and social and cultural activities, and for organizing self-help.

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[6] Fonds Soziales Wien. 2017. Flüchtlinge, Asyl und Grundversorgung. Grafiken und Daten zu Wien, Österreich und EU, S. 3.

4.2 Causes and consequences of uncertainty

Concept and programs of CoRE reflect an elaborated project, not only with regard to the expertise of practitioners in the field but also to what is known from scientific literature and research. However, the project is challenged fundamentally by the fact that asylum and integration policy, and that is a determining factor, are lying beyond the competence of the City. It is not local or regional but national law determining issues such as the access to key domains of integration (labour, education), and to the host society in general, creating that high level of uncertainty asylum seekers are confronted with during the determination process.

The challenges are multiple. First of all the situation may become uncomfortable, and produce confusion, or even resistance, among the organizations, and citizens, involved. Questions raised are: If the outcome of the asylum decision process is so uncertain why should we invest into the promotion of integration from day one? Would it not be better to downgrade expectations instead of making them even more unrealistic through early integration measures? And what happens if the asylum decision finally is negative, and the individual concerned gets in danger to be deported?

Uncertainty is not a quasi-natural epi-phenomenon of asylum processes; it is first of all a consequence of restrictive policies, mainly at national levels, and of an often opaque acting of authorities as well. In the current political context urban initiatives such as CoRE have to deal with a profound change in politics and public opinion, e.g. with an anti-immigration discourse, success of extreme right wing parties, and increasingly severe policy measures towards immigrants and refugees – with problematic consequences, as

the following example, deriving from Vienna's CoRE project, shows: Some of the minors who had participated in the peer mentoring programs, endowed with a formal certification of the City of Vienna in a public ceremony at the beginning of July 2017, had been forced meanwhile to return to their home country, Afghanistan.

Strategies of (self-) empowerment in a context of uncertainty expose all actors involved to a certain level of risk and vulnerability. At the same time they face, sometimes in a more manifest or in a more subtle way, a strong potential for tensions and conflict in the political arena, mirroring the specificities of multilevel policies, in particularly in the field of migration and asylum.

The situation requires a clear political positioning, hopefully in accordance with the actors involved, and strong arguments why under conditions of uncertainty empowerment strategies remain important. The CoRE project strengthens refugees' capacity to act, by stimulating the reflection on a life, and a future, under uncertain conditions, making visible the invisible, investing in skills and competences, encouraging the participation (and organization) of social and cultural activities as well as the shaping of own living environment: as citizens of the world.

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.

Urban Innovative Actions

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